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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Bureau of Agricultural Economics
Washington

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FARM POPULATION ESTIMATES

January 1, 1940

On January 1, 1940 there were 32,245,000 persons living on farms, according to the estimates of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics. This figure is close to the all-time high record of 1916 when the farm population consisted of 32,530,000 persons. The 1940 estimate shows an increase of 186,000 over last year, and brought the total increase for the last 10 years to 2,076,000. There has been an increase every year since 1929, with the exception of 1936 when there was a decrease of approximately 80,000.

The increase in farm population during the 1930's follows a decrease of 1,445,000 during the 1920's and a net loss of 463,000 between 1910 and 1920. By 1910 most of the farm land of the country had been occupied, and though there were some increases during the early years of the War of 1914-1918, there were rapid decreases after the entry of the United States into that War, with the resulting mobilization of manpower and large demands for workers in rapidly expanding industries which were no longer able to secure needed new workers from Europe. The decreases during the latter part of that decade were so large that there was a net loss for the entire period. In the years immediately following the War, farm population was rapidly drained off into expanding industrial and other employment. By 1927 there was some slowing down of the migration from farms to cities, and after the 1929 crash there was a further reduction in migration from farms. Whereas the net migration during the 1920's was approximately 6,000,000 and that for the preceding decade was about the same, the net migration from farms during the 1930's was only 2,179,000 persons.

This difference is not due primarily to an unprecedentedly large back-to-the-land movement resulting from the depression, but to the fact that when urban jobs were difficult to get the farm appeared more attractive to the young men and women reaching maturity in the 1930's. The Bureau's estimates show more people moving both to and from farms between 1920 and 1930 than between 1930 and 1940. The total number of moves to farms decreased from 13,100,000 to 10,600,000, and the total number of moves away from farms decreased even more sharply in the latter decade, dropping from 19,400,000 to 12,800,000.

The decrease in migration away from farms is due in large measure to the decrease in employment opportunities for rural youth during a period when jobs were scarce. The number of young people reaching the age when migration is normally at its height did not decrease during the decade. Instead it increased, and the Bureau believes that this increase will continue for several years more, as the effects of the peak in births of 1921 to 1924 are felt in a correspondingly large number of young people currently reaching the age when they ordinarily start out for themselves. But as a result of the decrease in migration, there are between $3\frac{1}{2}$ and 4 million more persons on farms than would be there if migration had been at the same rate as during the 1920's. Young adulthood, which is the time of greatest migration, was especially affected by this reduction in migration - at least 2 million of this total are young people between 15 and 30 years of age.

Changes in farm population throughout the country were by no means uniform. Some areas were affected by severe droughts which forced readjustments in farming organization and a net reduction in the population. Other areas were affected by rapid increases in the use of mechanical power for some farm operations or the development of improved strains of plants or animals or improved practices with the result that less manpower was required per unit of production. And in some areas there were important repercussions from changed domestic and foreign demands for our agricultural products and the attempts to adjust acreage to these demands. On the other hand, some areas served as havens of refuge for persons no longer required in urban industry, providing an opportunity whereby persons with little or no capital might assure themselves at least of subsistence, or perhaps offering the opportunity of reducing living costs. In some areas the number of young people reaching maturity was especially large, but the training which these young people had received was not sufficient to enable them to compete in an overcrowded labor market. The result was they remained near their homes where they knew conditions and were able to secure subsistence rather than venture into an unknown distant spot where the prospects appeared very uninviting. In some areas a demand for seasonal agricultural workers, coupled with the belief that opportunity lay in the West or the belief that under favorable climatic conditions one could certainly get along,

brought about an increase in farm population.

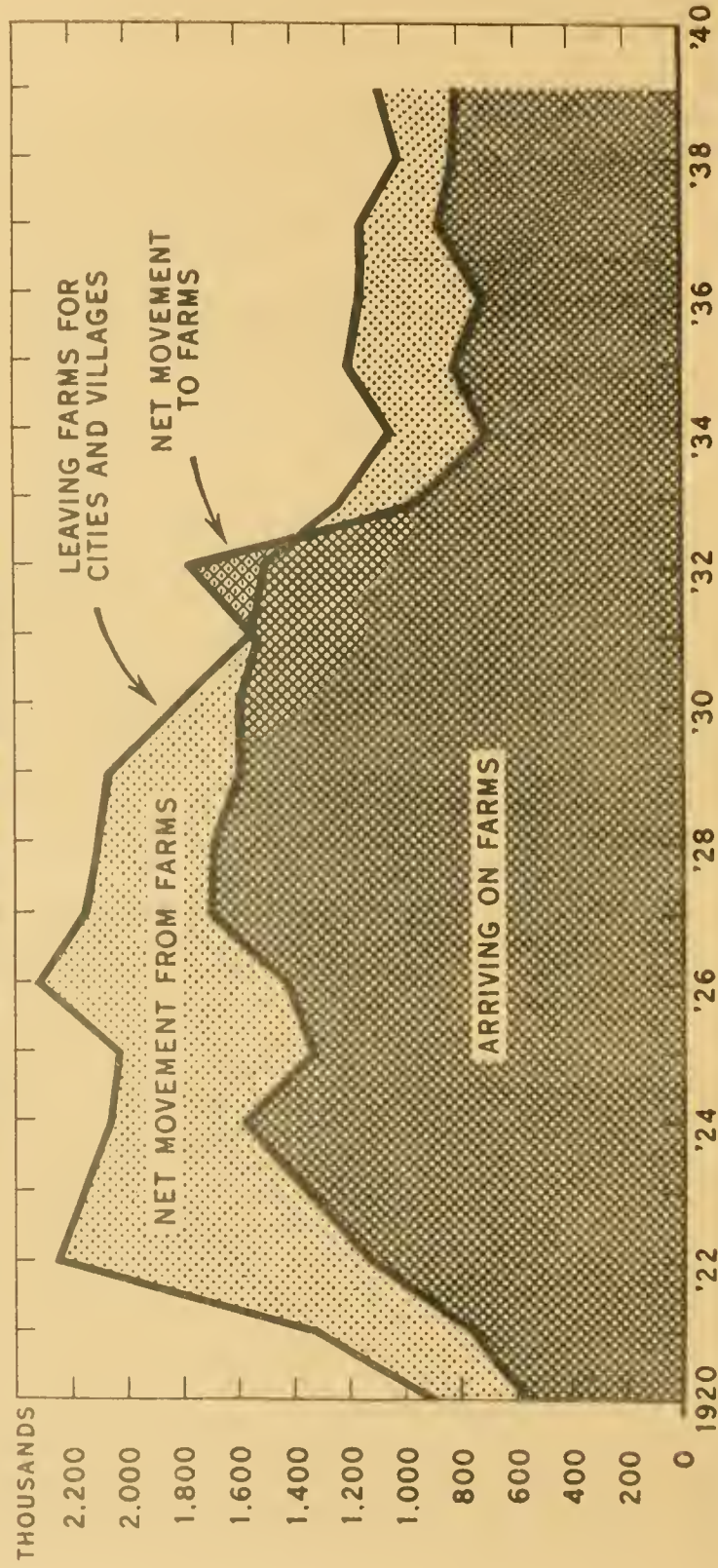
In general, it may be said that in the areas best adapted to commercial farming there was enough migration away from farms to have brought about a reduction in farm population, but in those areas less well adapted to commercial farming there were increases. Among the major geographic divisions, the largest percentage increases during the last ten years were reported by the New England and the Pacific Coast States, with the Middle Atlantic, East South Central, South Atlantic, and East North Central States also showing increases. The West North Central States reported a decrease and the increases in the West South Central and the Mountain States were very small, only $\frac{1}{2}$ of 1 percent and $2\frac{1}{2}$ percent, respectively.

One result of these different rates of change was to increase the differences in the number of people living on the farms of the several major divisions. In 1930, the West North Central with a farm population of 5,030,000, the East South Central with 5,052,000, and the West South Central with 5,275,000, were all bunched together. But by 1940, the number of people living on farms in the East South Central States had increased to 5,624,000, that of the West South Central States had increased to only 5,303,000, while that of the West North Central States had decreased to 4,840,000. The maximum difference among these three divisions was less than 250,000 in 1930, but in 1940 it had become nearly 800,000.

An increase in farm population at the present time means growing pressure of population on natural resources, especially in the poorer agricultural areas. Technological changes in agriculture have kept pace with those in industry, and the labor requirements for agricultural production have been decreased. Normal requirements in farm production for both domestic and foreign outlets can now be met with approximately 1,600,000 fewer workers on farms than in 1929 - which, with their dependents, means about 3,500,000 fewer persons. The estimates of employment on farms show a decrease of more than 300,000 between the beginning of 1930 and of 1940. Although the number of persons working on farms who are not effectively employed or who work only a small portion of the year is not known, it is probably quite large for already in 1929 nearly half of the farms produced only about 10 percent of all the crops that were sold or traded. Unemployment on farms, which seemed an anomaly prior to the present period, has increased, and the fact that the Census of Unemployment in 1937 reported 971,000 males living on farms who were totally unemployed or working on emergency projects, and an additional 576,000 who were classified as only partly employed is directly a result of the reduced migration away from farms.

MOVEMENT TO AND FROM FARMS, 1920-39

BIRTHS AND DEATHS NOT TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT



Differences between 1930-34 and 1935-39 reflect the differences in the level of business conditions during those two periods. The total farm population increased by 1,632,000 persons during the first 5 years, with the largest increase coming in 1932 when it amounted to more than 700,000. During the second 5-year period, however, the net increase was only 444,000 persons, and more than nine-tenths of this total is accounted for by the increases during 1938 and 1939. Conversely, the net loss by migration from farms was about two and one-half times as large during 1935-40 as during the preceding 5 years - 1,581,000 as compared with 598,000. During each of the 3 years 1937, 1938, and 1939, the net migration from farms was between 200,000 and 300,000. These losses are much less than those reported in the 1920's; in no year between 1920 and 1930 was the net migration from farms as low as 300,000 and in the peak year, 1922, it reached more than 1,000,000. Not only was the net migration from farms during the 1930's less than during the 1920's, but the gross movement, both that to farms and that from farms, was also smaller during the latter period. There was less movement in either direction during the 5 years, 1935-39, than during the preceding 5 years, or during 1925-29, or 1920-24. Apparently during a period of urban prosperity, young people on farms are more ready to take a chance and move, even though they have no assurance that they will be able to get a job there. Field studies have shown that after 1930 there was a somewhat greater tendency on the part of prospective migrants to move only if there was some assurance of placement at the destination, though it is well known that there is still a large volume of migration to destinations about which the migrants have little advance information and at which they remain only a short time.

The largest absolute gain during the 10-year period was in the South Atlantic States, the group consisting of the States along the Atlantic Coast from Maryland and Delaware to Florida. The next largest gain was in the East South Central States, including Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, and Mississippi, where the gain during the second 5 years was slightly greater than that during the first 5 years. The only other division in which the gain in 1935-39 exceeded that of 1930-34 was that including the three Pacific Coast States, where the farm population showed not increases of 69,000 in the first half and 165,000 in the second half of the decade. In the New England, the Middle Atlantic, and the East North Central States, the increases during the first 5-year period were approximately 4 to 6 times as great as those during the second 5 years. On the other hand, the three groups of States, which include the areas most severely affected by the droughts of 1934 and 1936 - the West North Central, West South Central, and the Mountain States, report increases before 1935 and decreases thereafter. The difference was especially marked in the West North Central States, where the increase was 78,000 for the first 5 years, but the decrease was 268,000 for the second 5 years of the 1930's.

Changes During 1939

The increase of 186,000 in the farm population during 1939, follows an increase of 240,000 in 1938. As in each of the 6 preceding years, more persons moved from farms to villages, towns, and cities than moved to farms during 1939. According to these estimates, 1,063,000 persons moved from farms to villages, towns, and cities, and 805,000 persons moved to farms. The net loss by this migration was 258,000. But this was more than offset by the excess of births over deaths. There were 753,000 births and 309,000 deaths.

With the exception of the West South Central States, in which the farm population remained about the same during the year, each of the major geographic divisions reported an increase. As in the preceding year, there was a net movement to farms in both the New England and the Pacific Coast States. In all of the other geographic divisions, the net movement was away from farms. The South Atlantic States contributed 64,000 to this net movement; the West South Central States, 63,000; the East South Central States, 61,000; and the West North Central States, 57,000. As in previous years, there was an excess of births over deaths in each division, with the South Atlantic and the East South Central Divisions each adding more than 100,000 persons, and the West South Central States contributing 85,000. These three groups of States, all in the South, contributed two-thirds of the total excess of births over deaths, although they include only about one-half of the total farm population.

The estimates for 1939 are based upon reports from 13,609 farmers in all parts of the country, supplying information for 78,544 farms.

Tables

Note: Except as otherwise indicated, the estimates given below are by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics and are adjusted to Census figures. Figures for 1930-1940 are subject to revision when 1940 Census data are released. Estimates for years since 1920 are based on returns from questionnaires mailed to farmers.

Table 1. - Farm Population in the United States

Year	:	Number of persons	:	Year	:	Number of persons
	:	on farms January 1	:		:	on farms January 1
1910	:	<u>/1</u> 32,076,960	:	1926	:	30,619,000
1911	:	32,110,000	:	1927	:	30,170,000
1912	:	32,210,000	:	1928	:	30,188,000
1913	:	32,270,000	:	1929	:	30,220,000
1914	:	32,320,000	:	1930	:	30,169,000
1915	:	32,440,000	:	1931	:	30,497,000
1916	:	32,530,000	:	1932	:	30,971,000
1917	:	32,340,000	:	1933	:	31,693,000
1918	:	31,770,000	:	1934	:	31,770,000
1919	:	30,930,000	:	1935	:	<u>/2</u> 31,800,907
1920	:	<u>/2</u> 31,614,269	:	1936	:	31,809,000
1921	:	31,763,000	:	1937	:	31,729,000
1922	:	31,749,000	:	1938	:	31,819,000
1923	:	31,130,000	:	1939	:	32,059,000
1924	:	30,817,000	:	1940	:	32,245,000
1925	:	30,830,000	:		:	
	:		:		:	

/1 Estimated, U. S. Bureau of the Census

/2 Enumerated, U. S. Bureau of the Census

Table 2. - Recent Losses and Gains in the Farm
Population of the United States

During period or calendar year	Net loss of farm population	Net gain in farm population
1910 - 1919	-463,000	-----
1920 - 1924	784,000	-----
1925 - 1929	661,000	-----
1930 - 1934	-----	1,632,000
1935 - 1939	-----	444,000
1910 - 1939	-----	168,000
1930	-----	328,000
1931	-----	471,000
1932	-----	722,000
1933	-----	77,000
1934	-----	31,000
1935	-----	8,000
1936	80,000	-----
1937	-----	90,000
1938	-----	240,000
1939	-----	186,000

Table 3. - Movement To and From Farms

Year	Persons		Persons		Net movement from	
	arriving at	farms	leaving	farms for	Cities,	Farms
	from cities,	towns, and	cities,	towns, and	towns, and	to cities,
	villages		villages		villages	towns,
					to	and
					farms	villages
1920	560,000		896,000		-----	336,000
1921	759,000		1,323,000		-----	564,000
1922	1,115,000		2,252,000		-----	1,137,000
1923	1,355,000		2,162,000		-----	807,000
1924	1,581,000		2,068,000		-----	487,000
1925	1,336,000		2,038,000		-----	702,000
1926	1,427,000		2,334,000		-----	907,000
1927	1,705,000		2,162,000		-----	457,000
1928	1,698,000		2,120,000		-----	422,000
1929	1,604,000		2,081,000		-----	477,000
1930	1,611,000		1,823,000		-----	212,000
1931	1,546,000		1,566,000		-----	20,000
1932	1,777,000		1,511,000		266,000	-----
1933	944,000		1,225,000		-----	281,000
1934	700,000		1,051,000		-----	351,000
1935	825,000		1,211,000		-----	386,000
1936	719,000		1,166,000		-----	447,000
1937	872,000		1,160,000		-----	288,000
1938	823,000		1,025,000		-----	202,000
1939	805,000		1,063,000		-----	258,000
1920 - 1924	5,370,000		8,701,000		-----	3,331,000
1925 - 1929	7,770,000		10,735,000		-----	2,965,000
1930 - 1934	6,578,000		7,176,000		-----	598,000
1935 - 1939	4,044,000		5,625,000		-----	1,581,000

Table 4. - Annual estimates of the farm population, births and deaths occurring in the farm population, and number of persons moving to and from farms for the United States and major geographic divisions, 1923 - 1940 /1

Division and year	: : Farm : population : on : January 1	: : Increases in farm : population during : the year due to: : Arrivals : from city, : Births: town, or : village	: : Decreases in farm : population during : the year due to: : Departures : for city, : Deaths: town, or : village	: : Gain or : loss due to : farm to farm : migra- : tion <u>/2</u>	
	000's	000's	000's	000's	000's
UNITED STATES:					
1940	32,245				
1939	32,059	753	805	309	1,063
1938	31,819	747	823	305	1,025
1937	31,729	719	872	341	1,160
1936	31,809	716	719	349	1,166
1935 <u>/3</u>	31,801	727	825	333	1,211
1934	31,770	749	700	344	1,051
1933	31,693	721	944	326	1,225
1932	30,971	746	1,777	328	1,511
1931	30,497	741	1,546	334	1,566
1930 <u>/4</u>	30,169	742	1,611	344	1,823
1929	30,220	750	1,604	324	2,081
1928	30,188	757	1,698	303	2,120
1927	30,170	763	1,705	288	2,162
1926	30,619	782	1,427	324	2,334
1925	30,830	795	1,336	304	2,038
1924	30,817	801	1,581	301	2,068
1923	31,130	810	1,355	316	2,162
New England:					
1940	746				
1939	729	14	40	9	28
1938	722	12	34	9	30
1937	709	11	37	9	26
1936	708	10	33	9	34
1935 <u>/3</u>	712	10	29	8	36
1934	713	11	27	8	32
1933	698	10	32	8	26
1932	660	10	56	8	33
1931	631	11	61	8	47
1930 <u>/4</u>	568	10	64	8	50
1929	583	10	45	8	62
1928	586	10	49	7	55
1927	589	10	55	7	61
1926	604	11	49	8	67
1925	610	11	41	7	51
1924	604	11	49	7	47
1923	608	11	41	7	49

Table 4. - Annual estimates of the farm population, births and deaths occurring in the farm population, and number of persons moving to and from farms for the United States and major geographic divisions, 1923 - 1940 /1, continued.

Division and year	:	:	:	:	:	:
	:	:	:	:	:	:
	:	:	:	:	:	:
	:	:	:	:	:	:
	Farm	Increases in farm	Decreases in farm	Gain or		
	population	population during	population during	loss due to		
	on	the year due to:	the year due to:	farm-to-farm		
	January 1	Arrivals	Departures	migra-		
		from city,	for city,	tion <u>/2</u>		
		Births:	Deaths:			
		town, or	town, or			
		village	village			
	000's	000's	000's	000's	000's	000's
Middle Atlantic:						
1940	1,941					
1939	1,922	32	72	22	74	11
1938	1,896	31	69	20	58	4
1937	1,887	26	68	22	68	5
1936	1,900	25	51	23	68	2
1935 <u>/3</u>	1,904	25	61	22	88	20
1934	1,893	25	64	24	58	4
1933	1,850	26	95	24	70	7
1932	1,784	27	139	23	88	1
1931	1,751	28	101	24	90	1
1930 <u>/4</u>	1,692	29	130	24	96	1
1929	1,714	29	112	23	140	-
1928	1,731	30	104	21	130	-
1927	1,748	30	97	20	124	-
1926	1,791	31	104	23	155	-
1925	1,807	31	102	21	128	-
1924	1,825	31	110	21	138	-
1923	1,852	32	103	22	140	-
East North Central:						
1940	4,352					
1939	4,318	90	127	48	151	16
1938	4,780	86	143	47	150	6
1937	4,777	82	142	50	186	15
1936	4,790	80	135	52	187	11
1935 <u>/3</u>	4,769	81	139	51	190	42
1934	4,750	81	112	54	150	30
1933	4,695	83	181	51	188	21
1932	4,583	85	293	52	231	3
1931	4,508	85	236	53	211	2
1930 <u>/4</u>	4,442	86	259	53	246	4
1929	4,429	87	261	50	285	-
1928	4,487	88	214	47	313	-
1927	4,477	88	275	44	309	-
1926	4,550	90	211	50	324	-
1925	4,598	92	252	47	345	-
1924	4,587	93	297	47	332	-
1923	4,621	94	264	49	343	-

Table 4. - Annual estimates of the farm population, births and deaths occurring in the farm population, and number of persons moving to and from farms for the United States and major geographic divisions, 1923 - 1940 /1, continued.

Division and year	: : Farm : population : on : January 1 : :	: : Increases in farm : population during : the year due to: : : Births: : : village	: : Arrivals : from city, : town, or : village	: : Decreases in farm : population during : the year due to: : : Deaths: : town, or : village	: : Departures: : for city, : town, or : village	: : Gain or : loss due to : farm to farm : migra- : tion <u>/2</u> :
	000's	000's	000's	000's	000's	000's
West North Central:						
1940	4,840					
1939	4,823	94	94	36	151	16
1938	4,827	96	110	36	178	4
1937	4,940	98	96	45	231	-31
1936	5,041	102	90	49	217	-27
1935 <u>/3</u>	5,108	104	108	45	212	-22
1934	5,162	111	90	49	204	-2
1933	5,149	109	125	46	175	-2
1932	5,069	112	306	46	291	-4
1931	5,005	114	300	46	298	-7
1930 <u>/4</u>	5,030	116	283	47	375	-10
1929	5,034	117	294	44	371	--
1928	5,019	118	311	41	373	--
1927	5,055	119	301	39	417	--
1926	5,098	122	249	44	370	--
1925	5,134	124	242	41	361	--
1924	5,133	125	278	41	361	--
1923	5,163	127	238	43	352	--
South Atlantic:						
1940	6,432					
1939	6,415	177	106	64	170	-32
1938	6,376	173	117	64	168	-19
1937	6,314	168	128	72	151	-11
1936	6,275	164	98	75	174	26
1935 <u>/3</u>	6,204	164	139	72	162	2
1934	6,140	169	109	73	151	20
1933	6,131	157	138	66	207	8
1932	6,038	164	178	68	180	-9
1931	5,947	159	170	70	196	0
1930 <u>/4</u>	5,864	160	172	72	207	0
1929	5,900	162	185	68	315	--
1928	5,910	163	198	63	308	--
1927	5,880	165	215	60	290	--
1926	6,013	168	155	68	388	--
1925	6,136	171	170	63	401	--
1924	6,125	173	219	63	318	--
1923	6,242	174	185	66	410	--

Table 4. - Annual estimates of the farm population, births and deaths occurring in the farm population, and number of persons moving to and from farms for the United States and major geographic divisions, 1923 - 1940 /1, continued.

Division and year	:	:	: Increases in farm :	: Decreases in farm :		
	:	Farm	: population during :	population during :	Gain or	
	:	population	: the year due to:	the year due to:	loss due to	
	:	on	:	Arrivals :	Departures :	farm to farm
	:	January 1	:	from city, :	for city, :	migra-
	:	:	:Births: town, or :	Deaths : town, or :	tion / <u>2</u>	
:	:	: village :	:	village :		
	000's	000's	000's	000's	000's	000's

East South Central:

1940	5,624					
1939	5,588	162	97	55	158	-10
1938	5,505	159	113	54	121	-14
1937	5,430	152	108	60	134	9
1936	5,377	152	94	59	129	- 5
1935 <u>/3</u>	5,335	153	109	57	161	- 2
1934	5,322	154	75	57	142	-12
1933	5,357	147	105	54	193	-17
1932	5,230	153	191	54	159	0
1931	5,136	146	153	55	151	0
1930 <u>/4</u>	5,052	146	169	59	177	0
1929	5,027	148	160	55	228	--
1928	4,992	149	195	52	257	--
1927	4,979	150	194	50	281	--
1926	5,057	154	120	55	297	--
1925	5,089	157	100	52	237	--
1924	5,088	158	153	52	258	--
1923	5,135	159	118	54	270	--

West South Central:

1940	5,303					
1939	5,305	133	141	48	204	-24
1938	5,291	139	126	47	197	- 7
1937	5,282	135	146	56	212	- 4
1936	5,344	135	112	56	222	-31
1935 <u>/3</u>	5,388	141	138	51	221	-51
1934	5,415	149	131	53	199	-46
1933	5,464	142	157	52	235	-36
1932	5,299	147	308	52	233	2
1931	5,249	150	305	53	346	- 6
1930 <u>/4</u>	5,275	147	264	55	378	- 6
1929	5,290	149	281	52	393	--
1928	5,243	150	300	48	355	--
1927	5,245	151	278	46	385	--
1926	5,343	155	261	52	462	--
1925	5,302	158	217	49	285	--
1924	5,305	159	235	48	349	--
1923	5,338	160	209	51	351	--

Table 4. - Annual estimates of the farm population, births and deaths occurring in the farm population, and number of persons moving to and from farms for the United States and major geographic divisions, 1923 - 1940 /1, continued.

Division and year	:	:	:	:	:	:
	:	:	:	:	:	:
	:	:	:	:	:	:
	:	:	:	:	:	:
	Farm	Increases in farm	Decreases in farm			
	population	population during	population during	Gain or		
	on	the year due to:	the year due to:	loss due to		
	January 1	Arrivals	Departures	farm to farm		
		from city,	for city,	migra-		
		Births: town, or	Deaths: town, or	tion /2		
		village	village			
	000's	000's	000's	000's	000's	000's
Mountain:						
1940	1,149					
1939	1,141	27	57	11	73	8
1938	1,131	29	47	12	60	6
1937	1,143	27	48	12	75	0
1936	1,164	28	42	12	79	0
1935 /3	1,188	30	42	13	81	- 2
1934	1,207	30	43	13	72	- 7
1933	1,202	29	47	12	69	8
1932	1,183	29	121	12	131	10
1931	1,140	30	97	12	86	9
1930 /4	1,122	31	113	13	123	3
1929	1,130	32	130	12	158	--
1928	1,112	32	164	12	166	--
1927	1,109	32	143	11	161	--
1926	1,100	33	137	12	149	--
1925	1,108	33	106	12	135	--
1924	1,109	33	134	11	157	--
1923	1,124	34	107	12	144	--
Pacific:						
1940	1,358					
1939	1,313	24	71	16	54	15
1938	1,291	22	64	16	63	20
1937	1,247	20	99	15	77	17
1936	1,210	20	64	14	56	23
1935 /3	1,193	19	60	14	60	12
1934	1,168	19	49	13	43	13
1933	1,147	18	64	13	62	12
1932	1,125	19	185	13	165	- 8
1931	1,130	18	123	13	141	1
1930 /4	1,124	17	157	13	171	8
1929	1,113	16	136	12	129	--
1928	1,108	17	163	12	163	--
1927	1,088	18	147	11	134	--
1926	1,063	18	141	12	122	--
1925	1,046	18	106	12	95	--
1924	1,041	18	106	11	108	--
1923	1,047	19	90	12	103	--

- /1 Preliminary figures, subject to correction when Census data become available. The farm population at the beginning of one year is equal to the farm population at the beginning of the previous year plus the births and arrivals at farms, minus deaths and departures from farms, plus or minus the gain or loss due to farm to farm migration. For the years 1930 to 1934, inclusive, certain allowances are included, though not shown in the table. These allowances are due to (a) changes to or from farming without change in residence and (b) changes in interpretation of Census instructions. It is not possible to separate the effects of these two factors.
- /2 Persons who move from farms in one geographic division to farms in another division. For the United States total these must balance. The figures on farm to farm movement were not tabulated separately before 1930.
- /3 Farm Population January 1, as enumerated by United States Bureau of the Census.
- /4 Farm Population January 1, as estimated on the basis of Census enumeration of April 1, 1930.

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